



# COMMUNITY INFORMATICS INITIATIVE

Graduate School of Library and  
Information Science

Illinois Informatics Institute

University of Illinois at Urbana-  
Champaign

## VO[I]CES

Fall 2008 Vol 1 Issue 2

The Newsletter for the Community Informatics Initiative at the University of Illinois

### Campus-wide CII projects receive seed funds

Under the auspices of the **Illinois Informatics Institute**, the Community Informatics Initiative (CII) of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) received funds from the **Provost's Office of the University of Illinois**. CII awarded seed grants to six faculty in April of 2008 and appointed them CII Fellows for 2008-09.



•**Chris Fennell** (Assistant Professor, Anthropology) will continue his collaborative work on heritage with local and descendant communities of New Philadelphia, Illinois, the earliest town planned and legally founded by an African American in the United States. This project will facilitate even greater interaction and exchange among the members of these communities by providing interactive, centralized Internet resources for their use.

•**Stacy Harwood** (Associate Professor, Urban and Regional Planning), with her project, "Connecting Low-Capacity Communities to the Brownfields Marketplace," will accelerate the implementation and transfer of a technology-based economic development tool designed to open up new marketing possibilities for distressed neighborhoods in St. Clair County, Illinois. This is an effort to help community-based organizations in the East St. Louis area turn vacant and/or abandoned properties into viable development projects.



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### GSLIS Dean John Unsworth reflects on CII

Five years ago, in 2003, when the Community Informatics Initiative hadn't yet been conceived, I heard a presentation given here at the university by Judith Ramaley, who was then Assistant Director of the Education and Human Resources Directorate (EHR) at the National Science Foundation. Her talk was on "The Engaged University" and in it, she said, among other things, that "engagement must be reciprocal, requiring the creation of a shared agenda, and it must be mutually beneficial to all participants." She went on to talk about ways in which a university can exercise civic responsibility—something that this university has struggled with over the years—and she pointed out three ways: "Find a means to link learning and community life through the design of the curriculum; serve as a center and a resource for community-building on the community's terms; use distinctive

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### New student group focuses on CI, gets active in community

One week before the start of the 2008 fall semester, a group of students met to discuss the formation of a Community Informatics student group. At the meeting we decided to focus on providing volunteer, career development and social activities for students with an interest in Community Informatics, and also that we would choose activities at a monthly organizing meeting open to all students. We also decided on a name: Community Informatics Club.



Students socialize at the CI Club potluck, the first event of the year.

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## Black Studies in the Digital Age

On July 24-27, 2008, more than 20 scholars met on the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus to study the connections between Black Studies and Community Informatics, including issues around archiving and digitizing materials on the history of Black Studies in the U.S. Organized and chaired by Professor Abdul Alkalimat (GSLIS and African American Studies), **eBlack Studies: The Workshop**, the first national workshop to launch eBlack Studies, brought together researchers from around the country for three full days. The workshop was funded by the National Council for Black Studies (NCBS), UIUC Department of African American Studies (DAAS), UIUC Chancellor's Office, UIUC Center for Advanced Studies and UIUC GSLIS/Community Informatics Initiative (CII).

Charles Ransom, Multicultural Librarian at University of Michigan's Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library, attended the workshop. Ransom has been selecting materials for multicultural studies collections since he arrived at the University of Michigan in the early 90s as the Diversity Librarian. He works with faculty to provide teaching materials, such as a recent course on the Black church in Detroit. Ransom says it was helpful for him to hear from other workshop participants about how they incorporate digital materials and media into their curricula.

"One thing that interested me is how much the younger faculty are incorporating hip-hop into their courses. Several others have students developing Web pages as part of their work," Ransom said. "Since the workshop, I've been trying to help tenured faculty incorporate more of those things into their work."

During their time at UIUC, the scholars discussed ways to bring the history of Black Studies into the digital age. Ransom says in the case of Michigan, there is an initiative to put together an exhibit on the history of the Black Studies program for its 40th anniversary, including collecting information and creating a display of posters and other artifacts.

"I would also like to digitize that information and put it into Deep Blue, the University of Michigan's institutional archive," Ransom said. "It would help to get students involved, perhaps by arranging an internship with the School of Information."

Ransom said many of the institutions represented by workshop participants are also coming up on the 40-year anniversaries of their Black Studies programs, so there was discussion about a project to commemorate the histories of Black Studies programs across the U.S.

Several of the workshop participants plan to attend the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASLAH) conference in October in Birmingham, Alabama to present some of the outcomes of the UIUC workshop. Others will present their work at the 33rd Annual National Council for Black Studies Conference in Atlanta in March 2009.

Visit <http://eblackstudies.org/workshop/> for details on the workshop and for information on future Black studies conferences and workshops.



**More than 20 scholars gathered to discuss black studies in the digital age at the first national workshop to launch eBlack Studies, organized and chaired by Professor Abdul Alkalimat (far left).**

## Teen Tech Team in São Tomé

This past summer, three teens from the East St. Louis (ESL) area went to São Tomé with staff and students from the Community Informatics Initiative. (São Tomé is the main island of the West African nation of São Tomé/Príncipe.) These teens--Keena-Rhee Flié of Centreville, Ill., Joseph Hines of Ed-

wardsville, Ill., and Evan L. Johnson of East St. Louis, Ill.-- have been part of **Teen Tech Team** in East St. Louis and they joined ongoing efforts by **Community Networking Director Paul Adams** to install computers in schools, libraries and other facilities on São Tomé. Evan was chosen to participate based on his successful involvement with **Community Concepts**, an ESL theater group that provides youth with performing and stage arts instruction. **Community Concepts director Christina Fisher** accompanied the youth as a chaperone. **Al Hamilton** also participated as a technical advisor.



Keena Flié and Joseph Hines and São Tomé high school students work on hard drives.

The travel expenses for the teens were covered by a \$14,000 grant from the **East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP)**. Some of the preparatory work by Paul Adams for the São Tomé journey was supported by the **Academy of Entrepreneurial Leadership** as well as funding from the Community Informatics Initiative. In addition to the hands-on engagement with teens and GSLIS students, Adams is conducting a long-term study of network sustainability in São Tomé.

Evan made a documentary about their collaboration with 10 São Tomé teens from the English Language Club to install a 16-computer lab at São Tomé's national high school. On Saturday, Nov. 8, 11:30am-1pm the three teens will join Paul Adams in a session about their experiences, including a screening of the video by Evan Johnson. All are welcome to attend and join in a free discussion with refreshments in Room 126, Library and Information Science Building, 501 E. Daniel, Champaign.



Joseph Hines, Jake Odland (UIUC Graduate Assistant), Keena Flié making ethernet cables at Trindade high school in São Tomé.



The Teen Tech team poses with students from the São Tomé national high school.



## Meet the Community Informatics faculty at GSLIS

The Community Informatics program at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) now has seven faculty members who regularly teach Community Informatics-related courses. Several of them came to GSLIS in the fall of 2007. Here's a brief description of the faculty members and their research interests:

### CII Directors



**Ann Bishop** (Ph.D., Syracuse) is co-director of the Community Informatics Initiative and an associate professor at GSLIS. Her research interests include social justice in the information professions; participatory action research in LIS; the scholarship of engagement; and community informatics.

Professor Bishop currently teaches two service-learning courses. One is a project-based course entitled Community Engagement that is held at Urbana-Champaign and off-site at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) in Chicago. She also teaches a course devoted to after-school programs, called Serving Children in Schools and Communities, which represents a collaboration with the Champaign School District and the College of Education. Professor Bishop recently returned from a trip to Brazil as a Senior Fulbright Specialist, where she taught a Community Informatics seminar at Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB) and visited with faculty and community leaders to learn about local community-based research projects.

She is also associate editor for the *Journal of Community Informatics* and her recent publications include co-authored "New Literacies and Community Inquiry" in *The Handbook of Research in New Literacies* (2007) and "Community Inquiry" in *Liberating Voices! A Pattern Language for Communication Revolution* (2008).

**Caroline Haythornthwaite** (Ph.D., Toronto) is co-director of the Community Informatics Initiative and professor at GSLIS. Her research interests include computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the Internet; information exchange via CMC; online communities; e-learning; social network analysis; collaboration; social informatics; and community informatics.



Professor Haythornthwaite currently teaches Distributed Knowledge (with Professor Chip Bruce) and will offer new courses in Research Methods in LIS, and Ubiquitous Learning (with Professor Michael Twidale) in Spring 2009.

She is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Community Informatics*, *New Media and Society*, and *Information, Communication and Society*. Her major publications include the *Handbook of e-Learning Research* (Sage, 2007), *Learning, Culture and Community in Online Education: Research and Practice* (Peter Lang, 2004) and *The Internet in Everyday Life* (Blackwell, 2002).

### Faculty



GSLIS Professor **Abdul Alkalimat** (Ph.D., University of Chicago; joint appointment in the Department of African American Studies) came to the University of Illinois from the University of Toledo, where he was a professor of sociology and director of the Africana Studies program. His research interests include digital inequality; community informatics; and African American intellectual history.

This semester Professor Alkalimat is teaching a course called The Digital Divide and he recently organized and hosted the first national workshop on eBlack Studies. In addition, he moderates the largest African American Studies discussion list, H-Afro-Am, and created and edits Malcolm X: A Research Site as well as eBlack Studies. He is a member of the editorial boards of *Information, Communication and Society*; *cy.Rev*; and *The Black Scholar*.

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His recent publications include *The African American Experience in Cyberspace: A Resource Guide to the Best Web Sites on Black Culture and History* (2004) and *A Census of Public Computing in Toledo, Ohio* (2004).

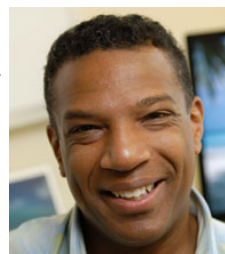


**Bertram (Chip) Bruce** (Ph.D., Texas at Austin) is a professor at GSLIS. His research interests include community informatics; environments to support inquiry-based learning; collaboration in knowledge making; and new literacy practices.

This semester Professor Bruce is teaching Community Informatics Concepts (LEEP version) and co-teaching Distributed Knowledge, a doctoral seminar. He is also directing research funded by a large Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant entitled Youth Community Informatics, and recently returned from a year at the National College of Ireland as a Fulbright Distinguished Chair.

His recent publications include *Libraries: Changing Information Space and Practice* (2006) and *Literacy in the Information Age: Inquiries into Meaning Making with New Technologies* (2003).

**Jon Gant** (Ph.D., Carnegie Mellon) is an associate professor at GSLIS. His research interests include electronic government; information technology and organization design; social networks, knowledge management, and information technology; strategic management of information systems; and geospatial technologies.



Professor Gant is currently teaching Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Strategic Information Management and was recently awarded funding through the Community Informatics Initiative for his research on how GIS can be used to increase citizen participation in community-level decision-making. He also led a GIS workshop with Dr. Charles Linville this past Spring for students, faculty, staff and community members.

His recent publications include *Digital Government and Geographic Information Systems* (2004).



**Carol Tilley** (Ph.D., Indiana) is an assistant professor at GSLIS. Her research interests include history of youth services librarianship; children's print culture; information inquiry and instruction in school libraries and media literacy.

Professor Tilley is currently teaching Youth Services Librarianship.

Her recent publications include "New Mentors for New Media: Harnessing the Instructional Potential of Cognitive Apprenticeships," a co-authored article in *Knowledge Quest* (2007), selected as one of the top twenty articles of 2007 by the Library Instruction Roundtable (LIRT) and *Of Nightingales and Supermen: How Youth Services Librarians Responded to Comics Between the Years 1938 and 1955* (2007).

**Kate Williams** (Ph.D., Michigan) is an assistant professor at GSLIS. Her research interests include the relationship between social networks; social capital; and the use of information and communications technology, particularly in low-income communities.



Professor Williams is currently teaching Community Informatics Concepts (on-campus section). She has received funding from the Institute for Museum and Library Services for "Chicago Community Informatics: Places, Uses, Resources," a study that uses a social capital/social network model to research actual and potential uses of information technology in six disadvantaged communities across Chicago.

Her recent publications include *A Census of Public Computing in Toledo, Ohio* (2004).

## New Community Informatics curriculum introduced

In 2008-09, the Community Informatics Initiative at GSLIS began offering a variety of new courses related to community informatics (CI), including three required "core" courses: **Community Informatics Concepts** (LIS590 CO/COL), an introductory CI course; **Community Engagement** (LIS490CE/CEL/CEO), a service-learning-based course; and **Introduction to Research Methods in LIS** (Spring 2009).

Community Informatics Concepts, taught by Professors Kate Williams (on-campus) and Chip Bruce (LEEP), surveys key CI concepts, providing students with the principles needed to understand how communities use information and communication technologies. Community Engagement, taught by Professor Ann Bishop (on-campus and Chicago) and Adjunct Taylor Willingham (LEEP) introduces community engagement theory and practice with a project-based approach that illustrates how information professionals learn about, collaborate with, and provide services to communities. Introduction to Research Methods in LIS, taught by Professor Caroline Haythornthwaite, will cover the fundamentals of social science research for library and information science professionals.

A range of other new courses has expanded the availability of CI-related offerings. **Geographic Information Systems** (GIS), a course team-taught by Professor Jon Gant and Dr. Charles Linville, shows how to apply GIS technology to help identify problems in communities and find management and public policy solutions. **The Digital Divide**, taught by Professor Abdul Alkalimat, examines the theoretical issues, empirical research, and policy debates defining and describing the digital divide. **Serving the Child in Schools and Community** is a service-learning course co-taught by professors Ann Bishop and Bonnie Armbruster in which students interact with children through after-school tutoring. **Distributed Knowledge** is a doctoral seminar on the meaning of knowledge, open to all graduate students campus-wide and co-taught by Professors Chip Bruce and Caroline Haythornthwaite. **Information Networks**, taught by Professor Les Gasser, examines human information networks (not limited to computer/communication networks or the Web) in communities, organizations, and society, and the structures, processes and implications of these networks.

## Fall Speaker Series: Rural Librarians to Claiming Space!

The Community Informatics Initiative's Fall 2008 Speaker Series kicked off the first week of the semester with a presentation by UIUC College of Business Professor Mu Xia. Xia reported on his research about user decision-making in online communities. Each semester, CII invites a group of faculty, researchers, and professionals to GS-LIS to discuss how their work intersects with the community informatics concepts. This semester, CII scheduled six events with topics ranging from geographic information systems to community gardening.

The presentations take place Wednesday afternoons from 2-3 pm in GSLIS Room 109:

August 27

### **Online Sharing Communities**

Mu Xia, UI Department of Business Administration

October 29

### **Libraries and Librarians Abroad**

Mortenson Center Visiting International Scholars

September 17

### **Rural Librarians as Community Leaders**

Anne Silvis, Extension Specialist, Leadership Development, UI Extension

November 12

### **Community Gardens**

Michelle Wander, Associate Professor, UI Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences

October 15

### **Using GIS to Increase Citizen Participation**

Jon Gant, Associate Professor, GSLIS

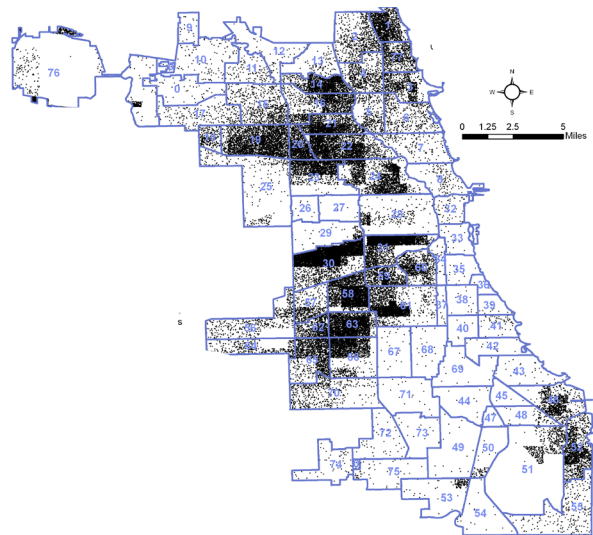
December 10

### **Claiming Space! Black Girls Creating and Critiquing Community**

Ruth Nicole Brown, Assistant Professor, UI Gender and Women's Studies and Educational Policy

## New CI Lab project connects ethnic Chicago in cyberspace to physical world

The **Community Informatics (CI) Lab** is a research project directed by Professor Kate Williams, and funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Student researchers in the lab have taken the next step in Williams' eChicago project: mapping all of the Web sites they have collected and showcased in **CI Lab Notes** over the past year. These Web sites are about ethnic communities in Chicago. The researchers have captured the site URLs in one large database and are harvesting and mapping the addresses of their domain registrations in "whois," the online database of domain registrations. In order to find out where these ethnic communities are based in cyberspace, the team is asking the question: Where are the online representations of these communities based – in the communities themselves, in the suburbs, or across the US or the world?



**This map shows the distribution of the Hispanic/Latino/Mexican population across Chicagoland. CI Lab team members are currently mapping the locations of URL addresses of Web sites about this Chicago ethnic group.**

"Close to 100 years of scholarship has examined how Chicagoans manage ethnicity and space. This research was based in Chicago, but influenced how the world thinks about cities," Professor Williams said. "Now we're looking at how Chicagoans – and the global migrations streaming into Chicago – manage ethnicity and cyberspace."

### Seed Funds continued from page 1



•**Sara McLafferty**, pictured, **Bruce Rhoads**, (Professors, Geography) and **Miriam Cope** (Ph.D. student, Geography) are collaborating on "Participatory GIS in the Upper Sangamon Watershed: Geovisualization, Collective Decision-Making and Environmental Governance." These scholars will examine how stakeholders' interactions with geographic information systems (GIS) are influenced by their contexts as well as cultural backgrounds.

•**Michelle Wander**, pictured, (Associate Professor, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences) and **Laura Witzling** (M.S. student, NRES) will use information technologies to learn about the soil quality of community gardens in Chicago's underserved communities. The project seeks ways to improve the science literacy of gardeners.



•**Ruth Nicole Brown** (Assistant Professor, Educational Policy Studies & Gender & Women's Studies) received a planning grant for "Not What They Said but How They Said It: The Political Courage of Black Girls and Women in Their Everyday Experiences." Beyond contributing to academic theories of civic engagement and democratic participation, Brown will articulate the significance of *Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths* (SOLHOT), a collaborative project between the university and community that puts into practice principles of a self-affirming and critically-engaged educational experience.

•**John Kindt**, Professor (Department of Business Administration) incorporated new materials into his course, "The Legal Environment of Business," that emphasize informatics and entrepreneurship.





## CI Club continued from page 1

The first event took place in September at the home of CII Project Coordinator, Sharon Irish. Forty students (most of them new to GSLIS) gathered to share a potluck dinner and talk about ways to get involved with the community. We shared information about CI-related research projects and got to know CI faculty and other students. Everyone was invited to attend the first organizing committee meeting.

We have since held several events: a dinner and discussion (attended by approximately 20 students) following the Mortenson Center Distinguished Lecture on September 17; a group volunteer day with U-C Books to Prisoners on September 27; and a picnic at Kickapoo State Park on October 5 to raise awareness about state budget cuts affecting Illinois' green spaces.



**The CI Club volunteered at the Books to Prisoners project in Urbana.**

To learn more and see pictures from our events, please visit the CI Club Facebook page at: <http://www.new.facebook.com/pages/Urbana-IL/Community-Informatics-Club/32113429895>. To be added to the Community Informatics Club list serv or get more information, please contact Jeff Ginger at [ginger@illinois.edu](mailto:ginger@illinois.edu).

Written by Kristin LoDolce

## Dean Unsworth's reflection on CI continued from page 1

strengths, based on traditions, institutional history and resource base to contribute through scholarship and outreach or engagement to the strengthening of community life and community capacity to identify and solve problems." Finally, she said "community-based work must be valued as a meaningful educational experience and a legitimate mode of scholarly work." I'm happy to say that the Community Informatics Initiative, as it has taken shape in the time since that talk, answers very well to Judith Ramaley's description of the Engaged University, and it does so because it involves and represents not just the interests of students, faculty and staff here at the university, but also community activists, community leaders, and community members in Champaign-Urbana and elsewhere around the state. Without the participation of both communities, Community Informatics isn't really possible—so many thanks to all of those whose participation and support make this unique and valuable initiative possible.



## Community Informatics Initiative

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